



# A NEW CHAPTER FOR ARKANSAS STUDENTS

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## 2018 REPORT

Arkansas Department of Education  
Division of Learning Services  
Literacy Support Unit



R · I · S · E  
ARKANSAS

READING INITIATIVE FOR  
STUDENT EXCELLENCE

#RISEarkansas | [RISEarkansas.org](http://RISEarkansas.org) |



**R**eading and literacy skills are vital for success in the classroom and life in general. For students looking toward a degree or new career path, high-level literacy skills are essential.

**– Governor Asa Hutchinson**

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## **OUR STORY BEGINS** in January 2017, when

the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) saw a need to build up stronger readers in Arkansas schools. Low scores in literacy achievement and the potential for success in our students inspired the Reading Initiative for Student Excellence – otherwise known as the R.I.S.E. Arkansas reading initiative. This movement is anchored in the science of reading and a commitment to transforming literacy education. Arkansas will write a new chapter – one of a new way of thinking, a new focus of instruction, a new future for our state and rising achievement.

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# RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

The need for change was undeniable. 2015 ACT Aspire results indicated that less than half of Arkansas' students in grades 3-10 scored ready or above in reading, and only 39 percent of that year's graduating seniors met reading readiness benchmarks on the ACT. Arkansas ranked in the lower third of states in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and we knew we could do more – we wanted to see these numbers rise.

For our state, we wanted to increase the number of students in grades 3-8 who meet the ACT Aspire reading readiness benchmark by 10 percent within three years; increase the number of graduates meeting the ACT reading readiness benchmark by 10 percent within five years; and rise above the bottom third in state comparisons within five years.



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**To make these long-term dreams a reality,  
we set three goals for the R.I.S.E. initiative:**

## **GOAL 1** Sharpen the focus and strengthen instruction.

Enhance and increase professional learning to provide educators with in-depth information related to the science of reading, evidence-based instructional strategies, and the skills to make data-based decisions for students.

## **GOAL 2** Create community collaboration.

Establish post-secondary programs alongside business and community partnerships that are critical to changing the landscape of literacy.

## **GOAL 3** Build a culture of reading.

Encourage school districts and community groups to plan local reading campaigns to promote the culture of reading within the state and provide access to books in the home.

# LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT TURNS THE PAGE

During the 2017 legislative session, Arkansas legislators passed Act 1063, also known as The Right to Read Act. This legislation targets educators in the pivotal role of reading instruction to be properly trained in knowledge and skills of the science of reading.

Teachers in K-6 core content areas of English, Science, Math, Social Studies – and teachers in K-12 Special Education – must show proficiency in the science of reading by the 2021-22 school year. All other teachers and administrators must show an awareness. ADE has identified various pathways to assist licensed teachers in meeting these requirements.

This legislation in support of the R.I.S.E. Arkansas initiative increased focus on the need for systemic and explicit reading instruction in the early grades and reinforcement of these practices in the higher grades as well as providing support and intervention techniques for struggling students.

**1 AWARENESS** can be met through approved trainings that meet the identified concepts as necessary for understanding the science of reading.

**2 PROFICIENCY** builds on the training aspect by requiring teachers to demonstrate the inclusion of these techniques in their instruction through classroom observations by trained assessors or show competency of the knowledge by passing the Foundations of Reading assessment.

In an effort to promote a culture of reading, books are handed out to children attending the R.I.S.E. Arkansas launch at the state Capitol.





# READ BETWEEN THE LINES

## THE SCIENCE OF READING IS DIFFERENT

Teachers must be very explicit in teaching phonics. We know that for phonics instruction to be successful, it must have scope and sequence that moves from easier to more difficult. From letter/sound correspondences to blends, digraphs, syllable types and division rules all the way through morphology, teachers must understand the intricacies in order to help a student make sense of the language. Phonics has traditionally been taught in context of a specific book or need; the focus now is to provide more explicit phonics instruction.

Research on successful reading instruction supports practicing what has already been learned. In contrast, leveled texts are largely predictable, filled with high frequency words, and contain a high level of picture support. When trying to read an unknown word, students were taught to look at the first letter and the picture and guess the word. These strategies did not provide students with the skills to decode unfamiliar words. The shift to using decodable texts – which have a large percentage of words that are decodable based on what has already been taught – will lead students to become automatic at decoding. The goal is to create readers who look at the word and try to sound it out before using the picture to check for visual clues.



Students in Arkansas will benefit as evidence based practices are incorporated into classroom instruction.

The four-part processor is one theoretical model used to explain how the brain learns to read. Use of this model started with the context processor and focused on context to make sense of the word. After extensive research using functional MRIs, neuroscientists have proven that the model has been taught in reverse order for decades. The phonological processor fires first, followed quickly by the orthographic processor. Then comes the meaning processor and finally the context processor. This is an example of existing research being refined and better understood through modern discovery.

In the past, high-frequency words were considered to have no regular spelling pattern; however, this is often not the case. Students were taught to memorize high-frequency words using flash cards rather than decoding the parts. Using the research of permanent word storage and orthographic mapping introduced by Linea Ehri and brought back to the forefront by David Kilpatrick, we can teach students to build their sight word vocabulary much more quickly using decoding techniques. Readers analyze each word with a focus on the parts that are decodable first and then the parts that are irregular.

We have very specific assessments for phonemic awareness and decoding which can help pinpoint areas of weakness in students. It is much more efficient to group students based on common needs and then work to build those skills in small group instruction than to put students into a common level of text. Teachers have difficulty using text level as a way to group students because of the lack of continuity in texts which are not based on a specific algorithm and differ between publishers.

## INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES IN THE SCIENCE OF READING

Teach phonics systematically and explicitly.

1

Read from decodable texts rather than leveled readers.

2

Introduce phonology followed by orthography before moving to the meaning.

3

Focus on the decodable part of high frequency words then address the parts that are irregular.

4

Group students based on common reading deficits instead of a level of reading ability.

5



Providing books for children to take home allows for reading to become more than a school assignment.

# GOAL 1

## SHARPEN THE FOCUS AND STRENGTHEN INSTRUCTION.

### EXPLORING THE RESEARCH

R.I.S.E. Arkansas is built on a solid foundation of research by many leaders in the field. One expert, David A. Kilpatrick, PhD, in his book *Essentials of Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties*, provides a practical guide to relevant research and strategies for working with children who have reading disabilities, which “pulls back the curtain to reveal not only what we know, but also the science behind how we know it.” Kilpatrick has been a key partner to make reading instruction more effective in Arkansas. He has

made numerous appearances at conferences and training sessions to engage educators in discussions about the science of reading.

To assist educators in reading the professional text, a book study guide has been developed and is available at [RISEArkansas.org](http://RISEArkansas.org). The document includes both participant guide sheets for mapping the information from each chapter and a structured facilitator guide to identify the key points for emphasis in relation to the R.I.S.E. Arkansas initiative.





## R.I.S.E. ACADEMY

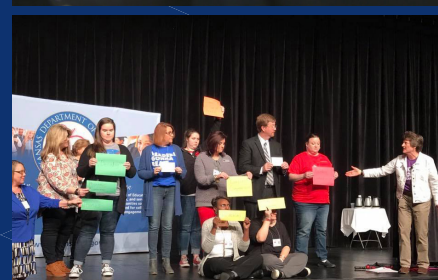
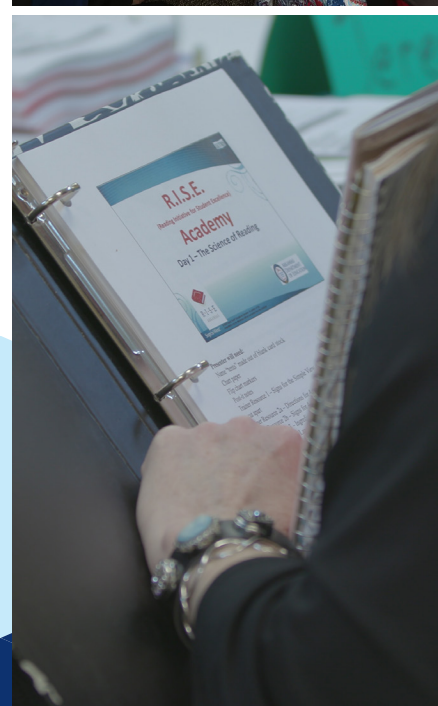
This six-day, intensive learning session provides high level training in the science of reading as well as a foundational approach to understanding the research to shift instructional practices. There are currently 160 R.I.S.E. Academy trainers/coaches who have completed 14 rigorous days of training and passed the national LETRS certification exam. The first cohort of R.I.S.E. Academy participants began in the summer of 2017, first targeting K-2 teachers. One thousand teachers began the year long process, which includes structured, and ongoing coaching from literacy specialists as they implement these practices in their classrooms. An additional two thousand teachers were trained in the summer of 2018. The Academy model expanded to include 3rd-6th grade teachers in summer 2018 with approximately 1,500 participants and places emphasis on the continual cycle of learning to improve reading skills. The vast reach of the R.I.S.E. Academy allows teachers to take part in a statewide conversation about the science of reading.

## READING CONFERENCE

To support Arkansas educators and provide access to nationally renowned experts in the field of reading and research, the ADE initiated a two-day reading conference – free to Arkansas educators – which has become an annual event. Teachers, administrators, and teams of reading specialists were encouraged to attend, and the first conference in 2016 drew over 700 educators. This number has more than doubled in subsequent years, showing the vested interest teachers have in making successful readers of their students.

## ONLINE LEARNING PATH

Providing relevant, rigorous professional learning opportunities requires a vast amount of time and resources. ArkansasIDEAS is the online learning management system operated through a partnership between ADE and Arkansas Educational Television Network (AETN), the state PBS television station. Content experts, both nationally and locally, assist in developing courses that include video presentations, resources, and assessments that allow teachers to explore topics at their own pace and find relevant information to meet their needs as they implement the science of reading in their classroom.



# GOAL 2

## CREATE COMMUNITY COLLABORATION.

### AR KIDS READ

The mission of AR Kids Read is to improve the future of Arkansas children and families by advancing literacy education through community engagement and tutoring so that all children can read proficiently by the end of the third grade. AR Kids Read is a volunteer-based literacy intervention program providing struggling readers with trained tutors who donate one hour each week. Tutors provide students with more opportunities to read by using easy-to-implement tutoring methods. Tutors work in small groups or one-on-one, building relationships between student and tutor that create an environment that is ideal for learning. ADE works with AR Kids Read to support tutors in their efforts by offering training sessions to identify skills and practices to help struggling readers.



Charlie Conklin, Executive Director of AR KIDS READ, promotes the use of science of reading concepts for use with students by the program tutors.

### GRADE LEVEL READING CAMPAIGN

ADE and the Arkansas Campaign for Grade Level Reading (AR-GLR) have a common mission: to improve the reading ability of every child in Arkansas. As partners, we have been able to identify and impact key factors that influence student learning and reading. By addressing student absenteeism, classroom instruction, family and community engagement, and summer learning loss, students are better prepared to learn and retain that learning. The relationship with AR-GLR helps move Arkansas forward by connecting a larger network of collaborative partners to implement solutions that foster our students' education.



## READ ACROSS ARKANSAS

In partnership with the Arkansas State Library, AR Kids Read, and the Arkansas Department of Health, the Read Across Arkansas Family Service Day in the Fall of 2017 was recognized as a statewide day of service by the state VolunteerAR program. Recognizing that low reading skills are not just a problem for students but for the entire community, the day served to encourage families and individuals to volunteer to read a book to children. All members of the community including businesses, faith-based organizations, nonprofits, and individuals were called to participate in the movement. The goal of the program was to provide a day where every child in Arkansas is able to enjoy reading a book with an adult or teen mentor.



## CIVIC AND BUSINESS PRESENTATIONS

Schools are a natural hub of many towns in our rural state, but by engaging key leaders from all aspects of the community, the community as a whole becomes stronger. Not only do we want to reach out to state-level leaders, but we also want local communities to come together in a support system for their own citizens. Resources devoted to improving the future and economic conditions of the local towns provide momentum for the greater goal. This network will help strengthen the resources and collaboration that we hope to expand across the state.

# GOAL 3

## BUILD A CULTURE OF READING.

### R.I.S.E. SCHOOLS

A R.I.S.E. School commits to collaborating with at least one community partner, creating a positive culture of reading in the school with various activities, and strengthen core reading instruction by supporting a prescribed learning pathway for teachers. To help schools that have made this commitment, each one received a R.I.S.E. School kit that included bookmarks, posters, a banner and much more. The initial response has been overwhelmingly positive, with more than 350 schools making the commitment to promote reading in their schools and communities.



### R.I.S.E. ARKANSAS SCHOOL AWARDS

To promote the continued growth of the R.I.S.E. Arkansas initiative, ADE created an award program to recognize the top R.I.S.E. Schools. These are those schools that have successfully implemented the strategies of R.I.S.E. Arkansas and embarked on a collaborative effort with community partners to strengthen reading instruction and promote a culture of reading. Nominations were made by the R.I.S.E. Train the Trainers group, who work closely with local teachers, administrators and school districts to bring about a change in the culture of reading in schools and in the state. Schools must have participated in the R.I.S.E. School program, attended a R.I.S.E. Academy and begun collaborative partnerships within their community. Ten schools were selected to receive the first Outstanding R.I.S.E. Arkansas School Award in 2018.



**Anne Watson Elementary**, East End S.D.  
**Asbell Elementary**, Fayetteville S.D.  
**Edgewood Elementary**, Watson Chapel S.D.  
**Drew Central Elementary**, Drew Central S.D.  
**Flippin Elementary**, Flippin S.D.  
**Midland Elementary**, Midland S.D.  
**Paris Elementary**, Paris S.D.  
**Poyen Elementary**, Poyen S.D.  
**SC Tucker Elementary**, Danville S.D.  
**Scranton Elementary**, Scranton S.D.



## SUMMER READING PROGRAM

During the summer months, it can be a challenge to keep students reading. Research has shown that students who do not read consistently over the summer can lose momentum in maintaining the progress they made during the school year, a phenomenon known as the “summer slide.” To encourage children and families to read independently throughout the summer, ADE provides links to free online, research-based resources. The “Find a Book” tool helps students create a personalized reading list and then locate those books at the nearest library or bookseller.

## READ ACROSS AMERICA DAY

Sponsored by the National Education Association and celebrated each year on Dr. Seuss’ birthday, March 2 is a time for citizens young and old to put on the famous red and white hat and read to a child. The initiative started in 1997 and has gained a large following, especially in Arkansas.

The State Capitol has become a favored place to gather school groups and volunteers to share in the joy of reading. The Governor even celebrates the day, and has been seen seated on the floor with the kids, engrossed in a good book.



## BOOK TALKS

R.I.S.E. Arkansas Book Talks help promote a positive reading culture in Arkansas by providing a way for readers to suggest books they find interesting and encouraging others to read as well. All readers are encouraged to participate by recording a short one- to two-minute talk about their favorite book. Videos are shared using the hashtag #RISEArkansas and are compiled on the R.I.S.E. Arkansas website for everyone to view. The intended audience is K-12 grade students, but anyone can find a new book to love through the program.



# THE NEXT CHAPTER

With the first full year of the R.I.S.E. Arkansas initiative in the books, we are excited about the progress toward the goals we set, partnerships that have been made, and changes we see starting to happen in our state.

The projects and programs started this year are in their infancy and expected to continue and grow as we have more conversations and connections with stakeholders. Partnerships and promotions with community collaborators are priority targets for the 2018-19 school year. Additional supports for teachers and administrators to complete the prescribed pathways to meet Act 1063 are in development. Training models will continue to expand to provide support for all levels of reading instruction and content areas.

Preliminary data and results are beginning to come in and fortify us in our efforts. Due to testing protocols, it will be several years before the first intensive target group of K-2 students begin to filter into measurable test results. While we do see some movement in the percentages on the ACT Aspire, it is much too early to draw any conclusions from them.

To better help us understand the data and the progress of our students, Arkansas has partnered with Dr. Timothy Odegard and the Tennessee Center for the Study and Treatment of Dyslexia to conduct an in-depth study of the efficacy of implementation of the science of reading principles in Arkansas. Data will be collected through surveys given to participants of the R.I.S.E. Academies, student performance on standardized state tests, and empirical data through observation and reports. This study is expected to span at least three years to allow for student progress through multiple stages of instruction.

We realize that this is not a process that will ever really end. It is the incorporation of sound current instructional practices that improve student learning. Just as the research and evidence has led us to this stage, we will continue to follow the progress of the leaders in the field of reading instruction to guide what is happening in Arkansas classrooms.

This is not a sprint. It's a marathon. There are many more hills to climb and lessons to learn, but we persist in our desire to make a new future for our students and our state.







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